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Snail the Whale

Here's Why

Fidgeting doesn't always mean a child isn't concentrating. In fact, quite often it means he's *trying* to concentrate. First, make sure a squirmy child doesn't need to go to the bathroom, and then try a little balancing activity.

Here's How

Tell the child the tale of poor old "Snail the Whale":

There once was snail named Whale
Who couldn't find the end of his tail.
Three spins to the left . . .
Three spins to the right . . .
Never failed to help Whale find his tail.

Where's Your Tail?

Now make a game of it! Get up and look for your own "tail." Then ask the child if he can find his. Spin slowly three times to the left, then slowly three times to the right. (*Slow* is the key here—about one revolution per eight seconds.)

Once he's found his tail, what's the best way to keep from losing it again? Sit down!

"Finding his tail" may help the child settle down and sit still . . . at least until that tail goes missing again!



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What Do Apples Sound Like?



Here's Why

To help children build their range of sensory experiences, their sense of adventure, and excitement for learning, challenge them to explore their physical world in different ways. For instance, when children explore apples, the first sense they engage is likely sight, then touch, then smell, and finally taste. But what about hearing? What do apples *sound* like?

Here's How

For any subject a child shows interest in, consider the senses typically *left out*. Challenge the child to discover the subject using those untapped senses.

For example: "What does it sound like when you bite into an apple? *Crunch*. What else goes *crunch*? What does an apple sound like when you roll it on a plate? Can you make that sound for me?" Explore the sounds fully and introduce new language and ideas to this safari of the senses!

And make sure to leave room for imagination. If apples talk, so be it. Have an apple chat!

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Egg Rolls

Here's Why

A squirmy child may need some stimulation to help release the squirming reflex. You can do this activity very gently with newborns and infants. Older children can do egg rolls on their own. For safety's sake, use the floor only—never a bed or other furniture.

Here's How

For infants: Lie face-up with baby lying face-up on your chest. Fold your knees into the "cannonball" position. Continually support baby while you slowly and gently rock to the left and right several times and forward and back like a rocking chair. As you do this, talk to baby or sing "The Egg Roll Song" (to the tune of "Row, Row, Row Your Boat.")

The Egg Roll Song

Roll, roll, roll along.
Sing a silly song.
Scramble.
Scramble.
Scramble.
Scramble.
Good thing our shells are strong!

With toddlers and preschoolers, you can do this same activity or show them how to do it on their own. Start by rolling side to side then curl up and rock forward and backward—a precursor to somersaulting.



The More the Merrier

Here's Why

Multisensory experiences help deepen learning and memory, especially when paired with movement.

Here's How

Try enriching the sensory stimulation of ordinary children's activities. And remember, the idea is the more senses, the merrier!

- Art time: *Brightly colored* papers are smooth to the *touch* and make a funny *sound* when you crinkle them, which creates a new texture to *feel*.
- Music time: Even the simplest children's song offers a variety of *sounds*. Move your body by acting out the words or dancing to the music!
- Outdoor time: Flowers have many different *colors* and *aromas*. *Touch* the soil to feel its granular texture, then add water and feel a completely new sensation—mud!
- Mealtime: Offer a variety of foods that provide different *aromas*, *tastes*, *temperatures*, *sounds*, *colors*, and *textures*. Let the child explore his food with his fingers—even if both of you wind up wearing some of it!



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Cozy Cocoon

Here's Why

Spinning is great for the vestibular system. Spinning slowly is even better to give the brain time to absorb the sensations.

Here's How

Have children form a long line and hold hands. Starting at one end, have children move so the line curls in to form a spiral. Be sure they move slowly. As they spiral together, the circle gets smaller and smaller while the giggles get bigger and bigger. When the cozy cocoon is as tight as can be, have the children slowly reverse their movements and open the spiral back into a straight line.

After children have done this a few times, add the "Cozy Cocoon" song. At the end of the song, have the kids break free and pretend to fly away like butterflies!



Cozy Cocoon

(sung to the tune of "The Wheels on the Bus")

The caterpillar spins
His cozy cocoon,
Cozy cocoon,
Cozy cocoon.
The caterpillar spins
His cozy cocoon,
So the butterfly
Can fly free!

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Weighty Matters

Here's Why

Varying experiences with different weights helps the proprioceptors learn to adapt to differing conditions.

Here's How

Whenever children are playing push-pull activities, such as pushing a baby carriage or a toy truck, add weight to the toy to vary the experience. Use anything you have handy, such as some books.

You can also vary experiences by having children push or pull things up inclines, through small spaces, over bumps, or through anything else that changes the terrain of the playing field.



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Crazy Crab Crawl

Here's Why

Develop transferable fitness by exploring the many different ways you can do one thing.

Here's How

Use children's natural curiosity to challenge their bodies. For this game, try finding all the ways you can crawl. Start by introducing the children to how a crab crawls. Have them sit on the floor with their hands behind them and lift up their bottoms and crawl like a crab. But this is Crazy Crab Crawling, so once they get the hang of it, introduce different fun challenges to navigate. For instance:

- Crab crawl around corners
- Crab navigate over small obstacles like a rolled up towel
- Crab limbo under a bar or table
- Crab zigzag through cones
- Crab tunnel through a hoop
- Crab mambo in a line with all the children
- Crab race across the floor or playground
- Crab treasure hunt
- Crab climb up the hill and roll back down like a snail

And any other crabby ideas the kids have!



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Gettin' Gluey (No Glue Required)



Here's Why

Cross-lateral movements are powerful tools for developing neural superhighways across the brain's corpus callosum. But crossing the midlines doesn't come naturally to little ones, so it helps to make a game of it.

Here's How

Wonder aloud how it would feel to have glue on your hands. Rub each child's hands as if you were applying glue.

Ask the children to show you what would happen if they put their gluey hands on their knees. Dramatize it for them: "Uh-oh. My hands are stuck on my knees!" Have the kids walk around with their hands "glued" to their knees.

Encourage the children to keep their hands on their knees while reinforcing the idea of stickiness. "This glue is really sticky. We'll have to pull really, really hard to unstick our hands. On the count of three: 1, 2, 3—pull!"

Try the glue game again with another body part—the sillier, the better!

Once the children get the idea, add cross-lateral movements. For instance, stick your right hand to your left shoulder. Or stick your left hand to your right knee. Or cross one or both arms behind the back.

Minute Moves

Here's Why

Little ones learn about the intangible concept of time by moving through it.

Here's How

Set the timer for one minute (or whatever time increment you believe your child or group of children can manage). Use the timer to demonstrate how long a minute is, then challenge the children to see what they can do in that amount of time. Here's a list to get you started, but by all means, have the kids make up their own Minute Moves!

- How far can you run in a minute?
- How much sand can you scoop into your bucket in a minute?
- How many times can you roll over in a minute?
- How many blocks can you stack in a minute?
- Can you hang from the monkey bars for a minute?
- Can you wiggle your toes for a minute?
- Can you bounce a ball for a minute?
- Can you stay still for a minute?
- Can you brush your teeth for a minute?
- How many kisses can you give Mommy in a minute?



Traffic Cop

Here's Why

The more practice children get at modifying their movements in different ways, the better they get at controlling their bodies—and themselves.

Here's How

Start the game by playing the role of traffic cop. As the game progresses, look for opportunities to let each child lead.

Choose a basic movement pattern children can do easily. For this example, let's say the children are all preschoolers who have mastered jumping with two feet.

Start the game by explaining that there's a terrible traffic jam, and the cars must get moving again. Have the children line up like cars on a road. When the traffic cop gives an instruction, the cars all have to move in that direction.

For instance: "Junky jalopies are very jumpy. Can you show me how you jump in place? Good. Now, can you show me how you jump forward?" As the children get good at jumping forward, stop the traffic and change the movement. (If you've got one, use a whistle, just like a real traffic cop!) "Now can you show me how you jump sideways?" Continue the game until the children have had a chance to jump in many different directions and ways. Here's a list of ways to get you started:

Forward	High	Straight	Between
Backward	Medium	Curvy	In front of
Right	Low	Zigzag	In back of
Left	Strong	Feet apart	Below
In a circle	Light	Feet together	Follow the leader
Fast	Smooth	Over	As a team
Slow	Jerky	Under	One at a time

When the children get the hang of the game, trade in the junky jalopies for race cars and running, dump trucks and crawling, or whatever the children come up with. With each vehicle, change directions, styles of movement, and pacing so children have many chances to control their movements in different ways.

If the children get really good at the game, try giving two-part instructions. For example, "Move forward, then to the right."



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How Many Ways Can You Say _____?

Here's Why

A child's voice and body are instruments for helping him communicate his thoughts. Learning to express ideas in different ways helps him master situational language.

Here's How

Start by asking the children to find different ways to say a single word—for example, the word *please*. Then prompt the children to experiment with their voices. For instance: "I wonder what *please* would sound like if you were very, very quiet? Loud? Happy? Sad?"

Encourage the children to use their full range of pitch and body language. For example: "I wonder what *please* sounds like when you're really tall? Or really short? I wonder what *please* sounds like if you're sliding down a slide?" Add silliness: "How does a cow say *please*?"

Other languages are often fascinating to little ones, too. Explain that children in Mexico don't say *please*; they say *por favor*, and in France they say *s'il vous plait*.



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Sing-a-Word Sing-Along

Here's Why

Music is a great tool for sharpening listening skills and understanding the concept of time.

Here's How

The object of this activity is for each child to sing only one word of the song, but to sing the whole song in tempo together. Any song the children know well will work. Have the children sit in a circle and decide who goes first. Take turns going clockwise around the circle.

Child 1: The
Child 2: itsy
Child 3: bitsy
Child 4: spider
Child 5: went

Child 1: up
Child 2: the
Child 3: water
Child 4: spout
And so forth . . .

Once the children get the hang of it, have them reverse direction and sing counterclockwise. Next, add a surprise element. Each time you ring a bell, they must change direction.



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In and Out

Here's Why

Experiencing directional words using your own body is the starting point for understanding that words can mean different things in different contexts.

Here's How

Give each child a floor tile, a hoop, a rope, or anything else that creates a defined space on the floor. Now challenge the children to put parts of their body in the space and leave the rest of their body out of the space. For instance:

- Can you put both hands *in* the space, but leave the rest of your body *out* of the space?
- Can you put one knee *in* the space and leave the rest of your body *out* of the space?
- Can you put your bottom *in* the space and leave nothing *outside* of the space?



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10 Great Things to Do Barefootin'



1. **Foot massage.** Massage feels good at any age, but is particularly great for babies just learning about their bodies.
2. **Cold feet!** For older kids, rub an ice cube over the child's feet for a great, shivery, sensory experience! Of course, be guided by the child. If it's too cold, it won't be fun.
3. **Texture track.** Scavenge around for different textures to walk or crawl on, including bubble wrap, sandpaper, tinfoil, and just for the fun of it, sticky tape!
4. **Barefoot soccer.** Outdoors in the grass, practice dribbling a soccer ball in bare feet. Indoors, set up a game of soccer on the floor using a beanbag as the ball!
5. **Piggie painting.** Outdoors, lay out a large sheet of paper and fill two foil pie plates with different colors of paint. Have kids step into the paint, then onto the paper, and see just how creative their feet can be!
6. **Toe tickles.** Put a feather between the child's toes and challenge him to tickle his own nose, ears, elbows, and so forth.
7. **Foot fishing.** Scatter some small blocks or toys on the floor and have the child pick them up with his toes and put them in a bucket or tray.
8. **Toe to toe.** Have children sit facing each other and press their feet together. Lift the feet and "dance" in midair to some high-energy music.
9. **Footraces.** Set up a race course and have children run different "foot-races" on different parts of their feet—their toes, heels, and the inside or outside edges of the feet. Once they get the hang of it, have them try racing sideways or backward.
10. **Ten tall tootsie tales.** Invite the child to paint faces on his toes. Talk about the different toes and make up different personalities for them. Then walk, run, and jump through the day, telling tall tootsie tales!